

Research Brief

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The People Speak Poll: State Budget Issues Top List of Concerns

Milwaukee-area citizens cite the state's budget as "the most important issue facing the seven-county Milwaukee region," according to the latest *People Speak* poll, conducted in late February and early March. Jobs had been the top concern of respondents in each previous edition of the poll, as shown in **Table 1**. The March 2011 poll found jobs rank second on the list of important issues, with property taxes, economic development, and education close behind.

The poll indicates that citizens' definitions of important issues often coincide with high-profile public debate on issues affecting large numbers of people. Health care, for example, ranked high as a concern in the September 2009 poll, conducted during the highly publicized national health care reform debate. Education ranked highly in June 2010, shortly after a public discourse about a potential mayoral takeover of the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and the appointment of a new MPS superintendent. The most recent poll was conducted during a period of vigorous debate over a state budget repair bill.

Table 1: What is the most important issue facing the Milwaukee region?

% responding...	March '11	Nov '10	June '10	Feb '09	Sept '09
state budget	34				
jobs	19	45	23	35	26
property taxes	10	6	10	13	17
economic development	9	10	2	9	13
schools/education	8	4	12	7	4
government waste/corruption	4	3	6	4	4
health/health care	2	4	3	5	8
transportation	1	4	5	3	3
crime/violence	1	3	6	3	7
social welfare/poverty	1	2	2	1	3
environment	0	1	2	1	2
other	5	14	19	19	15

Data and methodology

The 15-minute *People Speak* telephone survey was conducted by the Center for Urban Initiatives and Research at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee (CUIR) between February 28 and March 7, 2011. Respondents were selected by random digit dialing of exchanges and cell phone numbers located in Milwaukee, Waukesha, Washington, and Ozaukee Counties. The survey contained 14 opinion questions plus several questions about the respondent's demographics and characteristics. Only adults over age 18 were surveyed.

The 400 completed surveys are fairly representative of the four-county Milwaukee area population of 1.5 million, although the survey sample over-represents the white population and under-represents the African-American population in the region (**Table 2**). This is likely because the survey also under-represents residents of the City of Milwaukee. The age of the

Table 2: Representativeness of the survey sample

	Survey	Region*
Milwaukee County resident	50%	62%
Ozaukee County resident	7%	6%
Waukesha County resident	31%	25%
Washington County resident	13%	8%
City of Milwaukee resident	28%	38%
College or post college graduate	46%	31%
Homeowner	79%	64%
Income \$50,000 or more	51%	54%
Income under \$25,000	10%	21%
Parent	34%	32%
Married	64%	48%
Female	55%	52%
White	81%	77%
African-American	9%	16%
Under age 50	38%	58%

*Regional data from the 2008 American Communities Survey one-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau.

survey respondents also is not representative of the region's population.

The survey's margin of error is plus or minus 4.9 percentage points at a confidence level of 95%—meaning that there is a 95% probability that the survey results are accurate within 4.7 points in either direction.

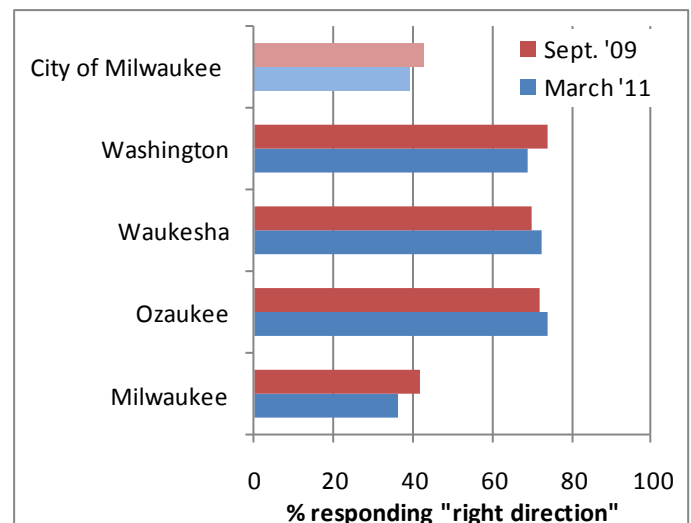
The People Speak is a tracking poll conducted at regular intervals throughout the year. Each poll consists of a series of regular tracking questions, plus a series of questions on a specific topic, which change with each edition of the poll. To track trends in opinion over the long term, many of the poll questions have been asked in prior Public Policy Forum opinion surveys of southeastern Wisconsin residents. Results from years prior to 2009 are from those earlier surveys and are presented here as contextual information.

The People Speak is designed and analyzed in partnership with CUIR and *The Business Journal Serving Greater Milwaukee*. This edition of the poll was funded by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

For complete results, visit:
www.peoplespeakpoll.org



Chart 2: Is your county government headed in the right direction?



Each *People Speak* poll begins with questions designed to gauge the general views of area residents on various levels of government and their own financial well being. A comparison of the results of this poll with those of the first *People Speak* poll in September 2009 shows mixed levels of optimism toward both.

Slightly less positive attitude toward government

The views of southeast Wisconsin citizens regarding the direction in which governments and public schools are headed have become slightly less positive since the first *People Speak* poll. Since September 2009, significantly fewer people feel their local schools are headed in the right direction, with about half feeling that way now (**Chart 1**). In addition, most respondents continue to feel the U.S. government is on the wrong track, with less than a third saying the federal government is now headed in the right direction.

Despite the election of a new governor and state legislature, however, there has been no change in opinion about whether the state is headed in the right direction, with most feeling it is on the wrong track.

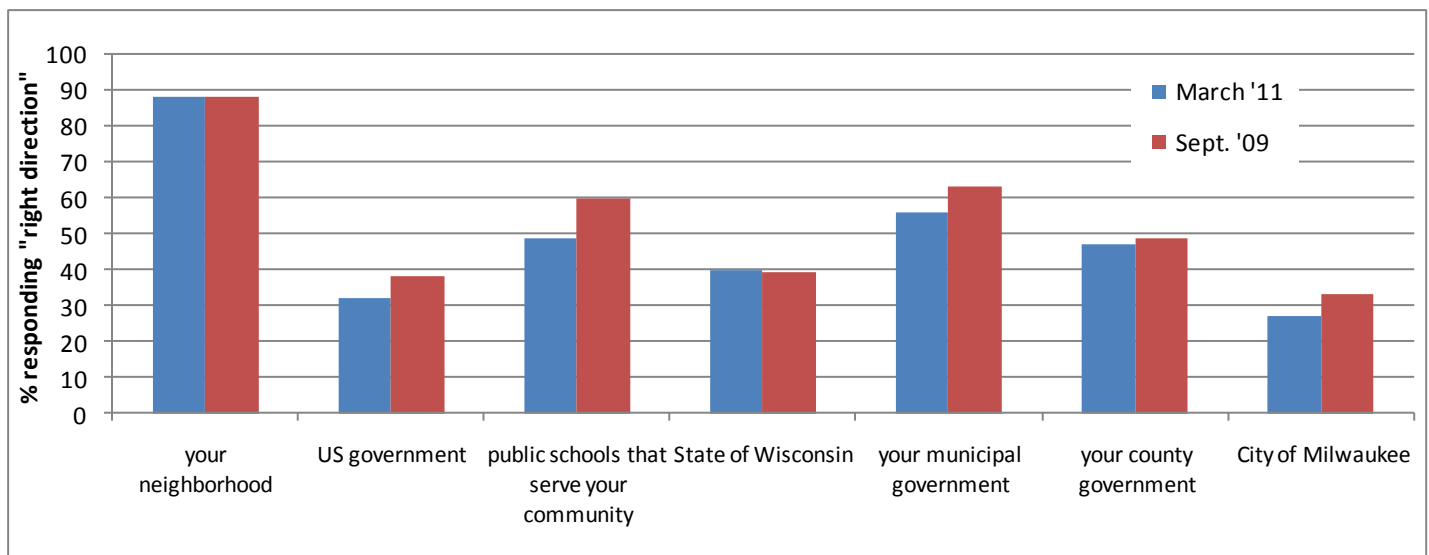
County and municipal governments are seen

more favorably than state and federal government, with the exception of the City of Milwaukee—27% see the city as headed in the right direction, while municipal governments in general are viewed positively by most respondents.

When opinions about county government are broken down by county, it becomes clear that the overall dissatisfaction with county government is attributable to residents of Milwaukee County (**Chart 2**, previous page). **Chart 2** also shows that residents of the City of Milwaukee do not feel any differently about Milwaukee County government than Milwaukee County residents on the whole.

With regard to their own neighborhood, most respondents are positive. However, a third (34%) of African-American respondents say their neighborhood is on the wrong track, compared to less than 10% of any other racial or ethnic group who feel that way. African-Americans also tend to say the state (85%), their county (77%), and their municipal governments (61%) are on the wrong track. Attitudes about the City of Milwaukee's direction do not vary by race.

Chart 1: Is the following headed in the right direction, or is it on the wrong track?



Greater pessimism about economic recovery

Compared to September 2009, respondents today are more pessimistic about the future of the local and national economies (**Chart 3**). Despite signs of economic recovery, optimism about the national and Milwaukee area economies has dropped 10 percentage points in each case, with less than a third of respondents now saying they are optimistic about the upcoming year.

However, **Chart 3** also shows that respondents continue to be optimistic about their own personal financial futures. **Chart 4** shows that African-American respondents tend to be the most optimistic about the future.

When asked about their satisfaction with their life in general, respondents indicated there has been no change in attitude since September 2009, with the vast majority being at least somewhat satisfied about the way their life is going (**Chart 5**).

Chart 6 on the next page shows respondents' answers to questions about financial worries. Paying for health care and maintaining the current standard of living are worrisome for most respondents. Respondents are not worried, on the whole, about keeping their jobs, although 28% of respondents did not answer this question, perhaps because they are not currently working. Across all these categories, African-Americans are "very worried" at a higher rate than respondents in general.

Chart 3: How optimistic or pessimistic are you about each of the following in [the next year]?

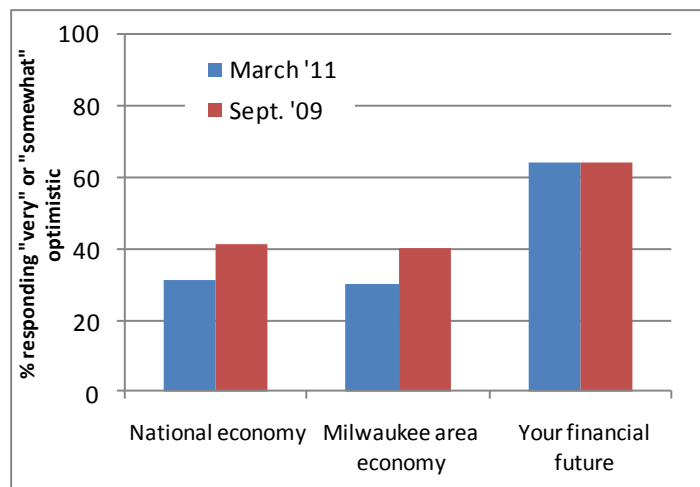


Chart 4: Optimism by race

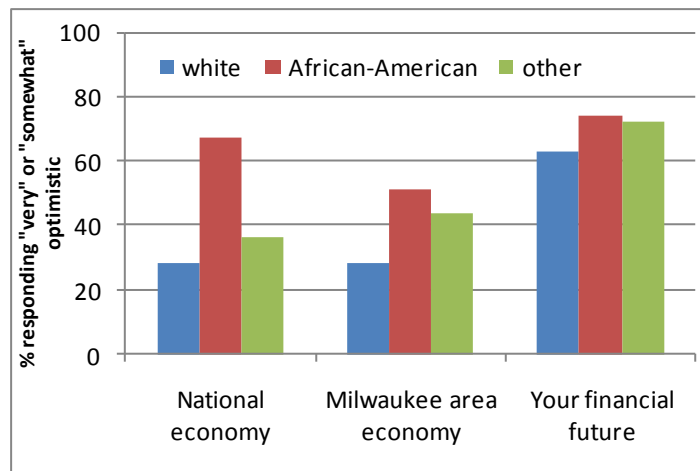


Chart 5: All things considered, would you say you are...with the way your life is going these days?

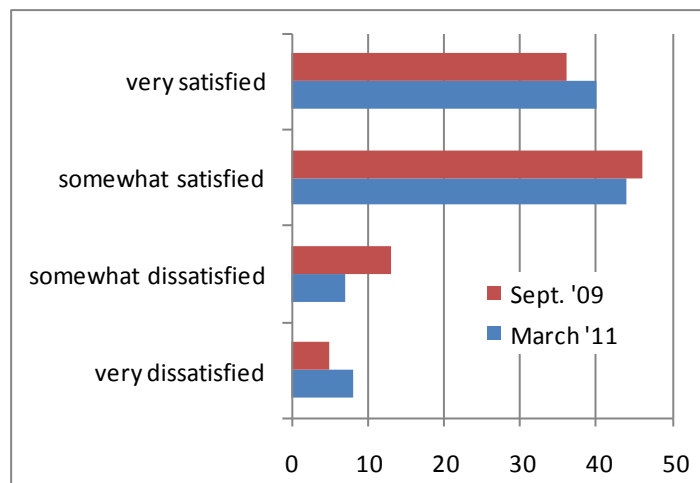
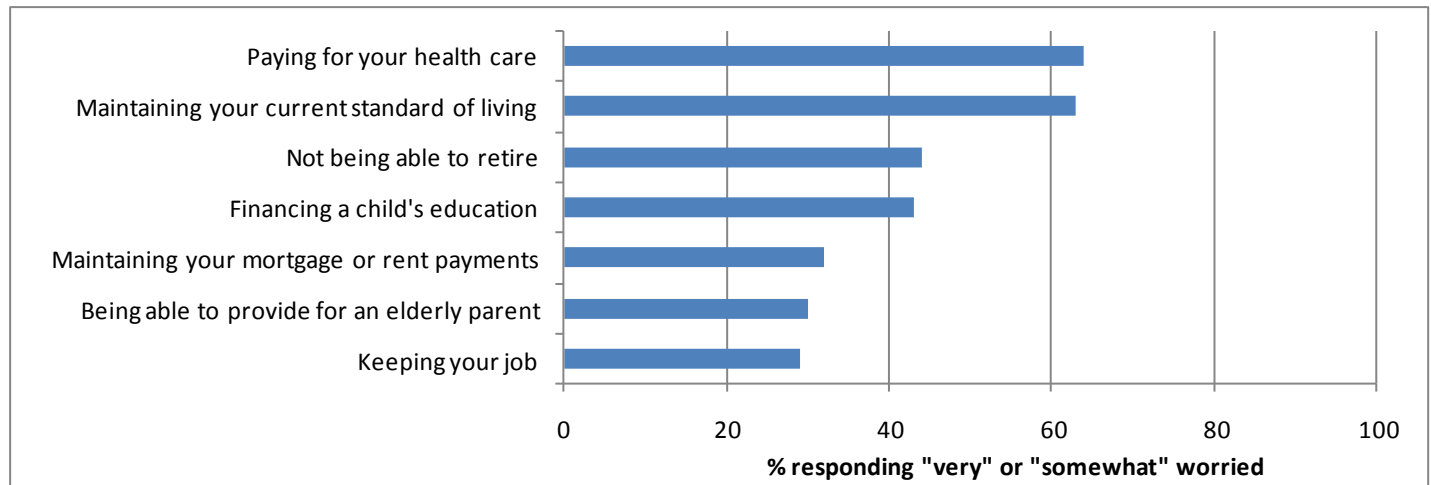


Chart 6: How worried are you about each of the following?


Perceptions of crime

The specific issue of focus for the March 2011 *People Speak* was citizens' perceptions of crime. The survey included questions on crime in the metro area, with particular emphasis on whether citizens perceive more or less crime today than a year ago, and whether they feel safe or unsafe at different locations in the region.

It is important to note that the survey sample skews somewhat older than the region's true demographics. When we weighted the responses to better reflect the region by age, we found that age can be correlated with perceptions of crime. Specifically, younger respondents are significantly more likely to perceive that there is less crime. Even when the data are unweighted, however, the results show that younger respondents tend to perceive less crime. Therefore, for simplicity's sake, the unweighted data are presented in the charts.

For context, we also discuss results from a similar crime perception survey conducted in November 2000. Unfortunately, we cannot use these results to measure a change in crime perception over time, as the survey sample demographics are not directly comparable (**Table 3**). Still, we consider discussion of the 2000 results to be instructive to policy deliberations.

Finally, the accuracy of the respondents' perceptions is gauged using actual crime rate data for the areas questioned in the survey. These data were obtained from the police departments of the cities of Milwaukee, Glendale, Wauwatosa and Brookfield, and the Village of Greendale. Crime data are for the years 2009 and 2010.

Table 3: Crime perception survey sample demographics, 2000 and 2011

	March '11	Nov. 2000
Milwaukee County	50%	64%
Ozaukee County	7%	4%
Waukesha County	31%	23%
Washington County	13%	9%
City of Milwaukee resident	28%	40%
Income over \$50,000	51%	35%
Female	55%	53%
White	81%	78%
African-American	9%	15%
Under age 50	38%	64%
Total respondents	400	800
Survey margin of error	+/- 4.9	+/- 3.5

Crime rate changes

Respondents were asked whether they felt there had been a change in crime in their neighborhood over the past year. Most (66%) feel there has been no change. About a fifth (19%) feel crime has declined and 10% feel it has increased. **Chart 7** shows that perceptions of neighborhood crime rates vary significantly by race, with African-American respondents and those from other minority groups being more likely to say crime has dropped.

Respondents also were asked about the crime rate in the City of Milwaukee. On the whole, respondents are more likely to feel crime has grown when asked about the city (33%) than when asked about their own neighborhood (10%). City residents also tend to feel there is more crime citywide (**Chart 8**).

Perceptions of the crime rate in the City of Milwaukee do not vary significantly by the county of residence, although more Milwaukee County residents feel crime in the city declined over the past year than do residents of the suburban counties, with about a fifth (22%) of Milwaukee County residents saying the city has seen less crime over the past year (**Chart 9**). The views of City of Milwaukee residents are substantially similar to Milwaukee County residents on this point.

Table 4: Major crime incidents in Milwaukee

Category	2009	2010
Assault offenses	8,718	8,677
Arson	347	241
Burglary	6,566	6,164
Criminal Damage	8,106	6,814
Locked Vehicle	6,979	5,880
Robbery	3,179	2,945
Sex offense	667	714
Theft	12,680	12,218
Vehicle theft	4,887	4,309
Homicide	64	80
Total specific offenses	52,193	48,042

The actual amount of crime in the City of Milwaukee has declined from 2009 to 2010, according to the Milwaukee Police Department (**Table 4**).

Chart 7: Change in crime rate in neighborhood over past year

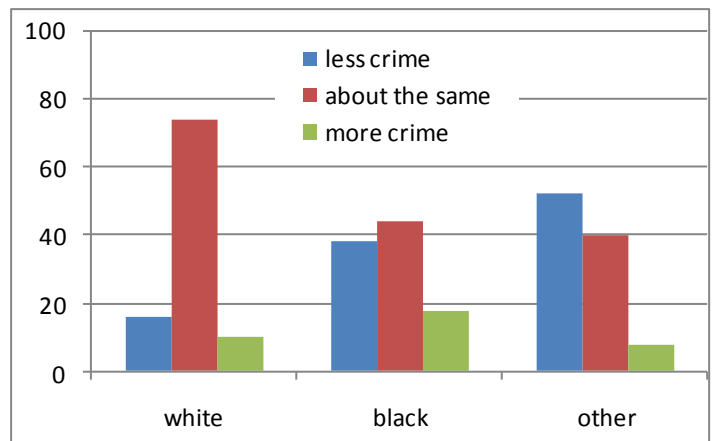


Chart 8: Crime rate perceptions of city residents

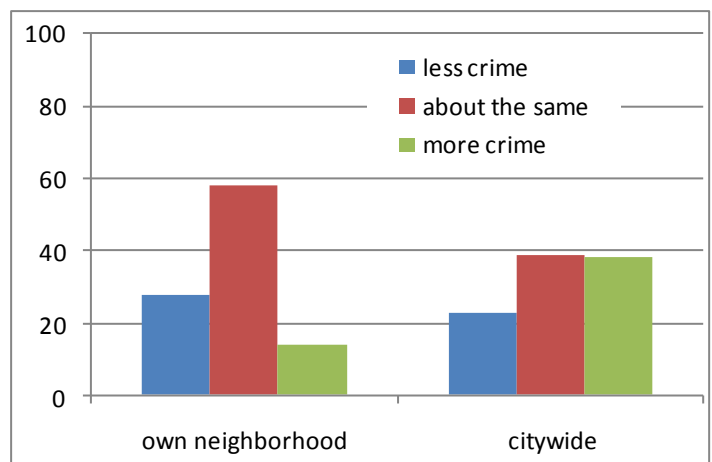
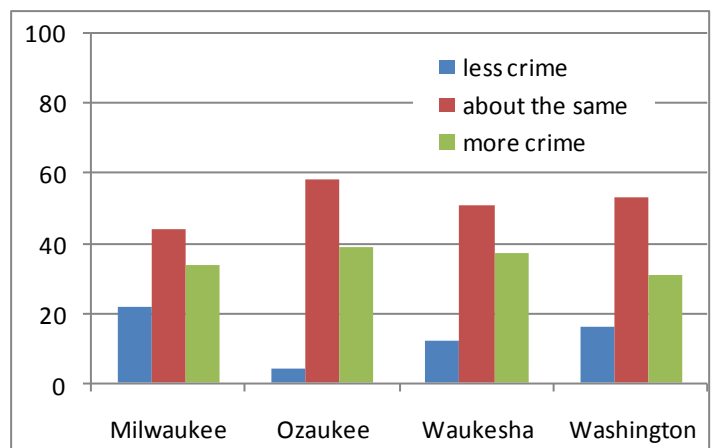


Chart 9: Perceptions of City of Milwaukee's crime rate, by county of residence



Relative safety

Respondents were asked a series of questions about specific places in the region where they might feel safe or unsafe if alone in the middle of the afternoon. Of the list of places, none caused most residents to feel unsafe under those circumstances. However, about half (54%) of respondents say they would feel unsafe alone in the middle of the afternoon on the city's north side. African-Americans are the only demographic group of which less than half of respondents (26%) feel unsafe on the north side.

Most respondents, regardless of their place of residence, feel safe on the city's south side, on the Marquette University campus, downtown, on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and in the Milwaukee suburbs (**Chart 10**). Less than a quarter of all respondents say they would be unsafe in any of those spots in the middle of the afternoon.

The same question was asked about the region's major shopping centers, with most respondents saying they feel safe at all area shopping malls. While this question revealed a major difference in the perception of safety

between Grand Avenue Mall and the suburban malls when asked in 2000, the current survey respondents see both Grand Avenue and Mayfair Mall to be of concern. About a fifth of all respondents say they would feel unsafe at these two malls in the middle of the afternoon.

Table 5 shows the differences in responses received in 2011 versus 2000 regarding perceptions of shopping center safety. Again, it is important to keep in mind the differences in survey samples between the two polls.

Table 5: Would you feel safe here alone in the middle of the afternoon?

% responding "unsafe"	March 2011	Nov. 2000
Grand Avenue Mall	22	14
Mayfair Mall	19	3
Southridge	7	4
Bayshore Mall	7	5
Brookfield Square	3	2

Chart 10: I am going to list some places in the metropolitan Milwaukee area. For each, please tell me whether you would feel safe or unsafe going there alone in the middle of the afternoon?

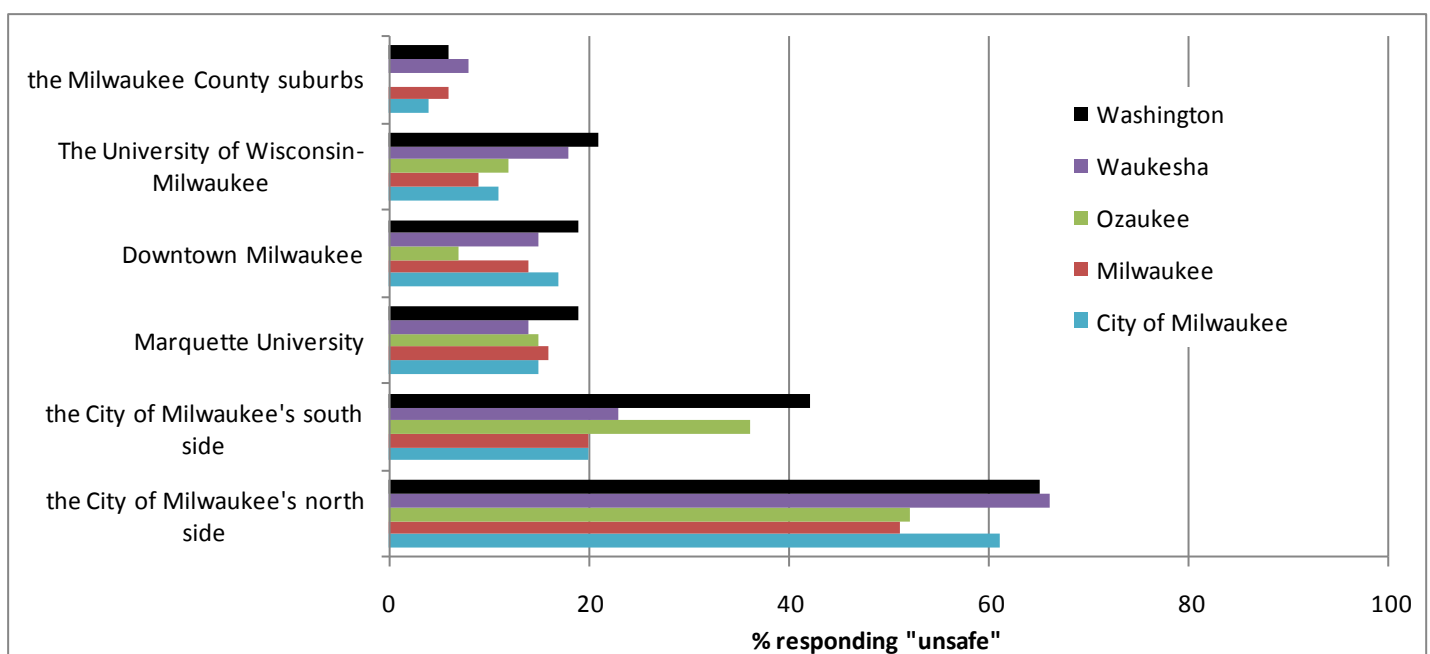


Table 6: Shopping center incident reports, selected offenses, 2010

<i>Incidents</i>	Retail theft	Traffic/Vehicle accidents	Assault	Robbery	Weapons offense	Disorderly conduct/fights
Grand Avenue Mall	not avail.	na	na	na	na	na
Mayfair Mall	478	106	11	1	1	33
Southridge (2009)	450	174	2	1	5	20
Bayshore Mall	337	187	3	1	2	42
Brookfield Square	262	127	1	0	1	33

Perceptions about the malls do not vary by residence and most respondents feel safe at every mall. African-Americans, however, tend to feel safe at a higher rate, with fewer than 10% saying they feel unsafe at any of the five malls (**Chart 11**).

The most recent crime data available for the malls indicate that the most common incident reported at any mall is retail theft (**Table 6**). The next most common use of police resources is for traffic offenses and accidents. The number of robberies, assaults, and weapon offenses is comparatively very low. Disorderly conduct incidences occur at every mall.

When asked for their source of information on crime in the City of Milwaukee, most respondents cite local media. Most (71%) get information from the local TV news and about half (53%) from local newspapers (**Chart 12**). The fact that most respondents feel crime in the City of Milwaukee has stayed the same over the past year when it has in fact declined, coupled with the fact the most respondents say they get their information on crime from local media, may indicate a connection between the prominence of crime coverage in local media and citizens' perceptions of crime. However, respondents who get their information from friends or neighbors are most likely to say there has been more crime in the City

Chart 11: Would you feel safe or unsafe going to these places alone in the middle of the afternoon?

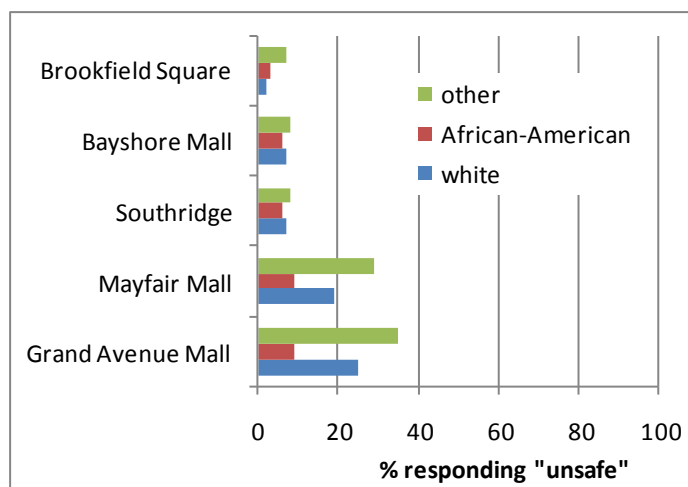
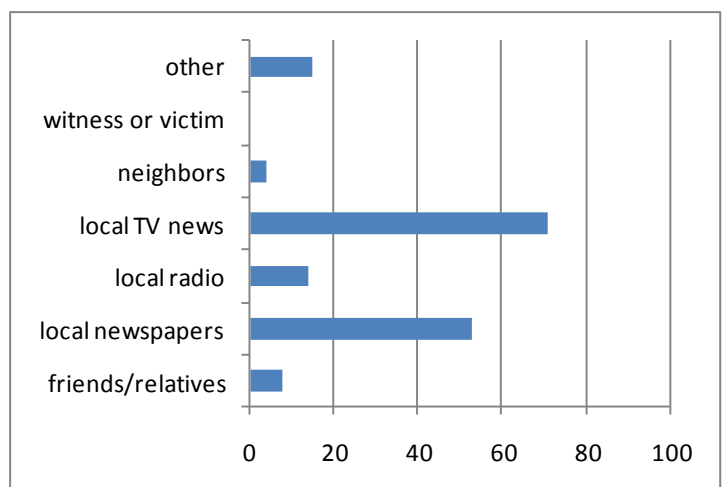


Chart 12: How do you learn about crime in the City of Milwaukee?



Crime prevention and reduction policies

The survey also solicited citizens' views on various public policies used to prevent and respond to crime and to administer justice. Of the four general policies questioned, the only one that is not perceived as effective at preventing crime by at least half of respondents is the carrying of concealed weapons. The policy seen as effective by the most respondents is strict enforcement of minor offenses (**Chart 13**).

Opinions about some of these policies differ by race, with African-American respondents less likely to feel the death penalty and conceal-carry policies are effective at crime prevention (**Chart 14**). The survey responses on the whole show that both perceptions of crime and opinions about crime policy are intertwined with race. Whites and African-Americans feel substantially different about policies to combat crime and have differing perceptions of safety in certain areas of the city.

Opinions are mostly split regarding the use of taxpayers dollars to fund several types of crime prevention/reduction policies. The only options for which a clear majority of respondents say they would be willing to pay higher taxes are youth diversion programs and hiring more law enforcement officers (**Chart 15**).

Chart 13: Are the following effective at preventing crime?

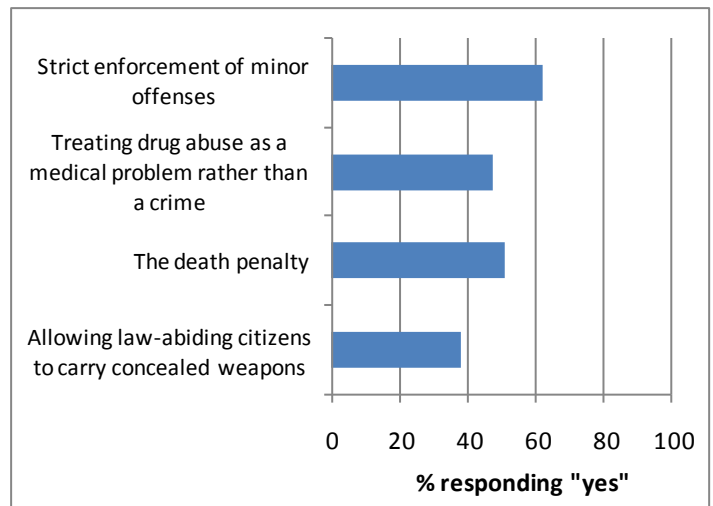


Chart 14: Effectiveness of crime prevention policies by race

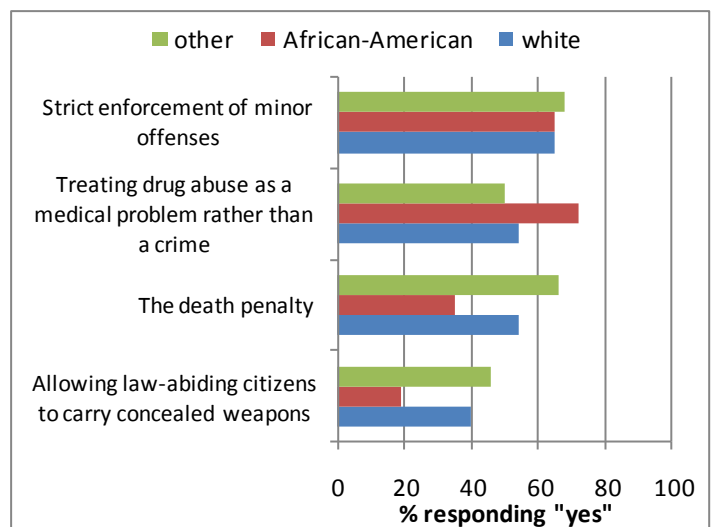


Chart 15: Are you willing to pay higher taxes to...

